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Kambara

Southern Lau, Fiji : an Ethnography

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BISHOP MUSEUM FELLOW; 1933-34.

INTRODUCTION

SCOPE AND METHOD

This monograph is based on field work in ethnography in the Fiji islands, from August 1933 to April 1934, made possible by a Bishop Museum fellowship. The main problem has been to understand and describe the native culture of the southern islands of the Lau or Eastern Archipelago of Fiji not only as it is functioning today but also in its historical setting.

The Lau islands, located on the border of Melanesia and Polynesia (fig. 1, insert), have long been subjected to a diversity of cultural influences from adjacent culture areas. Even within the last century, exotic traits from neighboring islands, especially Tonga, have altered the native pattern (pp. 29, 215). Before the advent of western civilization Lau presented the complicated picture of a changing marginal culture which lacked integration. Moreover much of the apparent unity in the configuration in native culture was due to geographic proximity rather than to the inner necessity and slow growth which characterizes true integration. In the last hundred years the interplay of European and Tongan influences has further disintegrated the old native culture. These have affected not only the superficial aspects of life, such as technology, but its deeper phases, such as the social organization and religion.

The complicated history and lack of integration of the Lauan culture presented problems to the ethnologist attempting to study the old life. In order to recover as much of the native culture as possible, I limited the investigation to a group of six islands in southern Lau where western influence had been relatively weak because of their isolation in the Fiji group and lack of commercially valuable natural resources. No Europeans live or own land on these islands which have no communication with the outside world except an occasional government or trade cutter. First, seeking to gain an intimate knowledge of the daily life of a specific group, I spent five months making an intensive investigation of the village of Tokalau on Kambara. Tokalau with 125 inhabitants is the highest ranking village on Kambara, the largest island in southern Lau. Kambara had a population of 446 natives living in four villages. The island was small enough to allow personal contact with each individual and large enough to provide a choice of good informants. After I had gained an understanding of the culture on Kambara I spent the

[Text continues on p. 5.-
Analyst]

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122 The field research was made possible by a fellowship from Yale University and the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. The data were assembled and the manuscript prepared with the help of a grant from the American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations.[1] To these institutions I am greatly indebted. I also wish to express my appreciation to the people of Fiji—colonial officials, European residents and natives who gave me every possible aid in this work. I thank especially His Excellency, Sir A. G. Murchison Fletcher, former Governor of Fiji, Mr. A. A. Wright, former Secretary for Native Affairs, the Hon. Victor W. T. McGusty, M.D., Secretary for Indian Affairs, Mr. A. J. Armstrong, Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs, Ratu J. L. V. Sukuna, District Commissioner of Lau and Chief Assistant of the Native Lands Commission, and Mr. George T. Barker of the Fiji Museum for their kindness and support. I also thank Dr. A. C. Smith, Assistant Curator of the New York Botanical Gardens, for identification of native plant names, Dr. Harry S. Ladd and Dr. J. E. Hoffmeister, former Research Associates of the University of Rochester, for information concerning the geology of the islands, and Dr. Felix M. Keesing, professor of anthropology at the University of Hawaii, for criticism of the manuscript. I am most indebted to Bernhard Tueting for assistance in the field and for the use of field notes which I gratefully acknowledge.

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113 [1] Facts of interest to the specialist, such as details of social organization, arts and crafts, mythology, and ceremonies, are being published elsewhere. See L. Thompson, "Southern Lau, Fiji, an Ethnography," Bishop Museum, *Bulletin 162* (in press); "Kulturgeschichte der Lauinseln (Fidschigruppe)," *Archiv für Anthropologie*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1937, translated in the *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 40, 1938, pp. 181-198; "Adzes from the Lau islands, Fiji," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 1938; "The Pottery of the Lau islands, Fiji," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 1938.